

SEARLE THE SAVIOUR?

SATURDAY'S ANSWER IS YES

Swinging 'Blues' clean up Avenue

Wycombe Wanderers 3, Walthamstow Avenue 0

WYCOMBE WANDERERS' re-styled Searle-Horseman spearhead swung into action for the first time at Loakes Park on Saturday—and had struggling Walthamstow gasping for breath within moments.

After Tuesday night's false start at Hayes, Keith Searle demonstrated what a loss he will be to Wealdstone, and what a God-send for power-lacking Wanderers.

It took him just 30 seconds to bring Avenue's goalkeeper, Parsons into the game; 10 minutes to set partner, Tony Horseman up for a shot that shook the visitors' crossbar; and 24 minutes to open his goalscoring account.

But if Searle is the previously missing-link to Wycombe's attack, then the benefit will work both ways. There were several betraying signs of over-anxiety on the centre forward's part, and, after half-time especially, a suggestion that he is slow to follow up for a second try should his first tackle prove unsuccessful.

Working with Horseman, and wingers Anthony and Worley, plus the backing of Baker and Lailey from midfield, he should never lack for support.

All round, the situation is most healthy. At last, on Saturday, Wanderers played worthily up to the tag of Isthmian League leaders. If not the biggest, it was certainly their most satisfying win since the early weeks of the season.

Neither Walthamstow's sorry League placing, nor the fact that John Maskell had only to deal with long-range shots on his way to yet another unbeaten 90 minutes, should be allowed to detract from their performance.

This was Wanderers at practically full strength, offering the kind of act-first, ask-later football for which the Loakes Park gallery has been screaming throughout September and October.

Keith Stephenson, a late programme change for Dave Thomas, took up position across field to John Delaney, while Julian Lailey returned from his Japanese travels in a different guise as midfield operator.

Although Lailey did not quite find his usual impeccable form, he did nonetheless do enough to confirm that he and Baker between them can command no-man's-land against any opposition—an advantage always of strategic importance.

Walthamstow were so quickly worn down that both Wycombe's number six and eight were often free to add weight in numbers to attacks. Ian Rundle, who made it 2-0 before half time, also tended to move forward, while covered by Stephenson in a thinned-out defence line.

Walthamstow resistance was first weakened by a goal-a-minute burst from 14th to 18th minute, including Searle (2), Worley, Baker and Anthony shots.

Six minutes later, Searle moved onto possession in the area, slipped round Parsons and slotted in goal number one through a broken defence.

Gale, making a greater contribution than of late, curled in a ball from the left that the 'keeper failed to hold, and it hit the post, with no one to follow up an inviting rebound after 34 minutes.

Sixty seconds on, Wycombe maintained their push on Walthamstow's backline, forcing a corner from which a scramble developed before Rundle squeezed past the muddle to press home one of his rare goals.

A lull in the excitement accompanied some late raiding from Walthamstow. But, although Delaney had to head away a corner just prior to half-time, he started the second period by using his head again, this time to go near to converting a Worley corner at Avenue's end.

Parsons was fighting the odds. In the 49th minute Worley put the ball inside for Baker to loose a similar effort. Parsons pushed it expertly across the face of the net, but Anthony darted in off the left for a first time volley, angled narrowly into the side netting to make it 3-0.

Full back, Sutton was booked for chopping Anthony down—not for the first time—in the 79th minute.

And, down to ten men, with substitute Branston on, but both Colbert and Collett off injured, Walthamstow must have been thankful to hear the final whistle after an arduous period of injury time.

Wycombe Wanderers: J. Maskell; I. Rundle, C. Gale; K. Stephenson, J. Delaney, J. Lailey; L. Worley, B. Baker, K. Searle, A. Horseman, G. Anthony. Sub.: D. Thomas (not used).

Walthamstow Avenue: G. Parsons; J. Sutton, R. Redman; E. Devlin, P. Terry, A. Colbert (sub.; R. Branston); B. Collett, T. Smith, V. Cogger, J. Mann, J. Roseman.